

A STUDY OF SOCIAL SECURITY AND GOVERNMENT SCHEMES FOR WIDOWS IN INDIA**Prof. Alka Sunil Mistry**

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Email Id: alkaa.mistry@gmail.com**Abstracts**

In India widowhood is a very challenging state of life, it's more than a living death. Because of dominance of religious superstitions and cultural practices, a widow is deemed as a bad omen and forced to live lonely and depressed life. Her presence is not allowed in auspicious occasions or 'Pooja vidhi' a widow's health is affected due to malnutrition, poverty and lack of medical help. In this situation, our society should change its approach towards a widow. There should be strong social security measures for widows.

Considering widow's conditions in our society, researcher tried to study challenges in front of them and also tried to study social security and government schemes for widows. This paper points out the government schemes and social security currently available to the widows in our country. There are a number of Schemes being implemented by various Ministries of the Government of India through States Governments/UT Administrations which address the common needs of widows also. While some schemes cover a broader segment of population of which widows constitute a part, there are widow specific schemes also.

Key Words: Widows, Social Security, Government Schemes, Widowhood, Lonely. Society

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Introduction

Widow is a woman who has lost her husband. Widowhood is a situation of social demise of the husband. In male dominating country like India, many conservative families consider widows as a liability. Number of widows in India is too much because of many social issues. From the available statistical data, there are 55 million widows in India, that is around as same as the entire population of South Africa and Tanzania. In India, there are diverse experiences, varied inter personal and social implications and various changes in the life of woman due to varying cultural changes across the country.

Lives of most of the widows have badly affected because of dominance of religious superstitions and cultural practices. In this paper, researcher tried to study the challenges faced by the widows and also tried to study the social security measures and government schemes for widows.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the challenges faced by the widows in India

2. To study social security measures for widows in India
3. To study the Government Schemes for Widows in India

Research Methodology

This paper is completely based on secondary data. The data for this paper collected from information available on websites and internet.

Historical Background in India

In Ancient India

In Vedic period, women had high esteem in the society. They had right to education and also had liberty to in the right choice of the spouses i.e., *swayamvar*. In respect of widowhood too, the norms were flexible enough. A widow had several options like *Sahamranath* that is, voluntarily joining the dead husband on his funeral pyre. There was also the process of *Niyog*: a procedure through which a widow could conceive another man's child if she desired to do so and thereafter spend the rest of her life nurturing the child, alternatively she could also opt for *Brahmacharya* that is rigid celibacy where she ceases perform any sexual activity. She also had the option of finding another spouse of her choice.

But during the later Vedic age and the early medieval era, the sublime status of women went on a downslide. In the opinion of 2000 year old text by Manu, the Hindu primogenitor of mankind: "A righteous wife is one who after the death of her husband constantly remains chaste and reaches heaven though she has no son." Traditions like 'widow-burning' or *Sati* framed the patterns of social behaviour of Hindu society for widows. The conduct towards them turned to be extremely unjust and sadistic. Conventionally, the widow was held responsible for her husband's death. Even the shadow of a widow was believed to inflict depredation and brought ill luck. It was also believed that once her husband died, the wife should pronounce all comforts of home. She should wear a plain white sari as a sign of lamentation. The appearance of widows at rituals, ceremonies and celebrations was considered unpropitious. Those coming from orthodox families, in some cases, even shove the woman's head after the death of husband. This was particularly done to make the widow sexually unattractive, so that no man is attracted to her or she never gets married.

Sati Ban and present situation

Sati was terminated during the British rule and in 1856 the British validated widow remarriage in India. It has been 72 years since independence, despite all of the advancements; still widows lead a dejected and miserable life in many towns of India. Widows in India, no longer throw themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands, but life for them can still be deprived. The experience of widowhood varies across customs and time periods. They are still subject to patriarchal traditions, religious legislations and extensive prejudice in inheritance rights. Many families of different communities in India still eschew and abandon widows. In general, widowhood in India is a very insubstantial period in the life of a woman, underlined by notable impoverishment, lack of family support and a prominent risk of mortality.

Vrindavan and Varanasi- The Widow Cities of India

Nobody can quite explain why these particular towns attract widows around India. Some come as genuine worshippers to commit their remaining years to the service of Radha-Krishna, but many others come here to get

away from barbaric family homes as they are considered as unwanted baggage. Some of the widows here lead a disgusted life as they have no one to look after them and they have to engage in practices like begging and prostitution for maintaining a sustainable livelihood. The Supreme Court of India after taking into consideration of media reports of their discreditable living conditions in these towns ordered the government and civic agencies to ameliorate the lives of women in Vrindavan. The Uttar Pradesh government has also initiated to appoint a panel to collect data on the socio-economic conditions of widows.

Child Widow in India

Child widows are those young girls who have endured both child marriage and widowhood before the age of eighteen. They have undergone multiple violations of their human rights from very young age. Being widow at the tender age, they lack ingress to justice and are manipulated by various persons. Rights are provided by our government for safeguarding them.

Laws made for the protection of Widow's Rights

1. Hindu Widow's Remarriage Act 1956

Under the East India Company rule, this act was enacted on 26 July 1856 which legalized remarriage of Hindu widows in all jurisdictions. It was the first important social reform law after the abolition of Sati by Lord William Bentinck. Due to which widows are entitled to remarry on their choice.

2. Property rights of the Widows

Earlier, widows who decided to remarry were forbid by the law from inheriting their deceased husband's property. As stated under the provisions of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, widows who choose to remarry still have a right on their deceased husband's property. She is grouped under Class –I heirs of her deceased husband and shall have the right to inherit. However, the Hindu Succession Act also prescribes that certain widow who cannot succeed or inherit. "Certain widows remarrying may not inherit as widows. Any heir, who is related to an intestate as the widow of a pre-deceased son or the widow of a brother shall not be entitled to succeed to the property of the intestate as such widow, if on the date the succession opens, she has re-married."

Great work of Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve

He founded an educational institution, Hindu Widows Home, in 1896, in Poona to help widows support themselves, in case they were unable to remarry.

Maharshi Dhondo Keshav Karve, more commonly known as Anna Karve, was instrumental in empowering women in pre-independence India and promoting widows' education.

The social reformer and educator established the widow Marriage Association in 1893 and in the same year, he shocked everyone after he opted to marry a widow himself. His first wife had passed away earlier in the year 1891.

A Landmark conference on widows in India was held in the year of 1994 at IIM Bangalore. Widows from different parts of India were invited to bring their predicament into public discussion. This allowed them to share their feelings and struggles with the rest of the group members.

Welfare Schemes for Widows

There are a number of Schemes being implemented by various Ministries of the Government of India through States Governments/UT Administrations which address the common needs of widows also. While some schemes

cover a broader segment of population of which widows constitute a part, there are widow specific schemes also. The major schemes of Government of India in this regard are as under:

Home for Widows: A Home for Widows has been set up in Vrindavan, UP with a capacity of 1000 inmates to provide widows a safe and secure place of stay, health services, and nutritious food, legal and counselling services.

Swadhar Greh Scheme: The Ministry of Women and Child Development implements Swadhar Greh Scheme which envisions a supportive institutional framework for women victims of difficult circumstances so that they could lead their life with dignity and conviction.

The Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme: The Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme of Ministry of Women and Child Development aims to empower rural women through community participation and to create an environment in which they realize their full potential.

Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS): The Ministry of Rural Development is implementing Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS) under which Pension Scheme for Widows as well as Pension Scheme for the Elderly below poverty line are operated.

National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS): The Ministry of Rural Development implements National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) under which monetary grant of Rs. 20,000 is given as lump sum assistance to the bereaved household in the event of death of the bread-winner.

Annapurna Scheme: Under Annapurna Scheme of the Ministry of Rural Development, ten kg of food grain is given to those eligible aged persons who have remained uncovered under the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS).

Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana: The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana National Rural Livelihood Mission of the Ministry of Rural Development aims at creating efficient and effective institutional platforms of the rural poor.

Prime Minister Awaas Yojana (PMAY-G) : The Prime Minister Awaas Yojana (PMAY-G) of Ministry of Rural Development and the Prime Minister Awaas Yojana (PMAY-U) of the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs aims at providing affordable housing for women.

Nari Arthik Sashaktikaran Yojan: The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment implements Nari Arthik Sashaktikaran Yojana to support Scheduled Castes, Single Women/Widows to take up income generating activities.

Integrated Programme for Older Persons: The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment implements Integrated Programme for Older Persons to improve the quality of life of senior citizens.

Assistance for vocational training of widows of ex-servicemen: The Ministry of Defence provides financial assistance for vocational training of widows of ex-servicemen, treatment of serious diseases of non-pensioner ex-servicemen/widows and daughter's marriage/widows' remarriage.

This information was given by the Minister of Women and Child Development, Smriti Zubin Irani, in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

Conclusion

The real voice for change in this situation regarding widows in our country, must come from the within and the first step would be the change of the credulous mind-set that denies widows their right to live and equal status in

the society. We, as the citizens of a democratic country must see their hardships and try to sensitize the issue. Many welfare schemes including, employment opportunities must be given to them by the government so that they become financially independent. The awareness of their struggles must be raised so that necessary steps can be taken for their welfare.

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